

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

# The Riverfront Springfield, Massachusetts

August 5, 2010



**Urban Land  
Institute**

**Boston**

Serving the Six New England States

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# Executive Summary

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Under the direction of the Urban Land Institute Boston, The Riverfront Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened in Springfield, MA in May 2010, bringing together stakeholders, city and community leaders, and a panel of land use and development professionals for a day-long session focused on the City's most underutilized natural asset: The Connecticut River riverfront.

Focusing on the stretch of riverfront that extends from Springfield's Memorial Bridge in the north to the South End Bridge in the south, over the course of the day, the team met with the City's planning and development staff, and toured Riverfront Park and adjacent areas, before interviewing a dozen stakeholders and community leaders to understand the area and its dynamics.

The panel then held an internal charrette during which it identified opportunities consistent with the city's stated goals, and developed viable development concepts for three distinct portions of the Riverfront that addressed an appropriate mix of uses, building form, access, and circulation. Data collected by the city's planning and development staff prior to the TAP, including reports from two recent ULI Boston Technical Advisory Panels for adjacent areas of the City and ULI's 2007 National Advisory Panel, informed these initial concepts, which the panel presented at a public meeting and which are included in this report.

The report that follows provides background about the TAP programs, an overview of the issues associated with Riverfront Park, and the Panel's development concepts for the Riverfront.

*Chapter 1: Background* gives an overview of the Urban Land Institute Boston and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs), and provides a detailed list of participants in the May 2010 Springfield Riverfront TAP, which included city officials, stakeholders, as well as the Urban Land Institute's Panelists.

*Chapter 2: Springfield's Riverfront* first provides a brief overview of the City of Springfield's Objectives for this Technical Assistance Panel, and then gives an overview of the Study Area including its boundary and key physical issues and constraints. This chapter also addresses Springfield's economic climate, with a particular focus on the real estate / housing market, before exploring the issues related to public access within the study area. Finally, a summary of issues identified or raised while on the tour is included; the issues identified in *Chapter 2* informed the development concepts proposed and refined by the panel during the afternoon's charrette.

Finally, *Chapter 3: Observations and Findings*, presents the Thematic Framework through which the Panel approached the Riverfront study area during the charrette, and which guided refinement of the development concepts. The report then presents a Long Term Vision for each of the three sub-areas identified within the Riverfront Study Area (moving from north to south): (1) The Downtown Riverfront; (2) The Hall of Fame Transit-Oriented Development; (3) The Southern Riverfront. A list of short term priorities, that includes smaller, relatively manageable projects, some of which could be implemented by next summer, concludes the report.

# 1 | Background

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## a. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

The Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Boston District Council Public Outreach Committee convenes Technical Assistance Panels at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of under-resourced communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges who benefit from planning and development professionals providing pro bono recommendations. At the TAP a group of diverse professionals representing the full spectrum of land use and real estate disciplines typically spend one to two days visiting and analyzing existing built environments, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives, as well as those in the 2006 ULI National Advisory Services Panel Report.

## b. Urban Land Institute (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the institute now has more than 30,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open

exchange of ideas, information and experience among local, national and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places. The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to help sustain and create thriving communities. ULI Boston serves the six New England states.

## c. Building on the ULI National Report

The Urban Land Institute has engaged in a sustained effort with the City of Springfield since September, 2006, when it held a week-long Advisory Services panel composed of nationally recognized players to explore strategies to renew and sustain a vibrant community in the City. That panel's assessment of the City began from 40,000 feet, looking at its position within a regional hierarchy of cities to explore possibilities for viable long term planning. The panel's recommendations addressed opportunities within the city at multiple scales and across municipal governing branches and departments. Key recommendations included:

- Encourage strong community leadership from the highest level to step forward;
- Leave the Springfield Finance Control Board in place for another term;
- Make downtown the urban center of the Pioneer Valley, a great place to live, work, and play;

- Embrace diversity throughout the city; and
- Conserve Springfield’s neighborhoods.

Since the National Advisory Panel, the City has built on that effort and partnered with ULI Boston to conduct two TAPs in October, 2007 that addressed key districts within the city: Springfield’s Downtown and its adjacent South End Neighborhood (with special focus on the Hollywood Area and Gemini site within the neighborhood).

### Springfield TAP Study Areas



- Riverfront TAP
- Downtown TAP
- Hollywood/Gemini TAP

### Downtown TAP

The Downtown TAP considered a study area around the business core that spanned from Union Station southeast to State Street, and from the Connecticut Riverfront to the Springfield Armory. The study area included river frontage north and south of Memorial Bridge, but the panel focused almost exclusively on the downtown core and on implementation strategies for catalyzing revitalization. The May 2010 Riverfront TAP built on this work to identify opportunities for creating strong, usable, and inviting links between the Riverfront and the downtown core.

Some of the key recommendations provided by the Downtown TAP panel include:

#### 1. Revitalizing Downtown

- Introduction of “Round-the-clock” vitality, through a balanced mix of housing, employment, and higher education uses
- Pursuit of market rate housing opportunities and public sector jobs
- Engagement of existing downtown stakeholders

#### 2. Address Perceptions Regarding Public Safety and Image

#### 3. Leadership and Organizational Structure

- Strengthen Coalitions for Interest Groups, including Arts and Entertainment, Retail/Merchants, Residents, as well as Financial and Other Services
- Downtown Champion Needed
- Roles and Responsibilities

4. *Facilitate Organizational Changes to Promote Real Estate Development*

- An organization with sufficient capacity to assemble land and negotiate real estate transactions is needed

5. *Make Parking an Asset*

6. *Improve Funding*

7. *Physical Priorities and Framework for Revitalization*

- Strengthen the “heart of the City”— Court Square to the Quadrangle
- Develop infill/downtown housing to support a dynamic community
- Provide Services
- Use Transportation infrastructure to enhance, not relocate, activity
- Promote downtown identity and branding
- Connect Riverfront Trails to a Broader Regional System

Hollywood-Gemini TAP

The Hollywood-Gemini TAP focused on this residential neighborhood south the downtown, which is connected most directly by commercial Main Street and is one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods. Because of its physical proximity as well as public perceptions, the future of Springfield’s downtown is intertwined with the South End’s struggles, and the neighborhood merited a TAP of its own.

The Hollywood-Gemini TAP panel used the National Advisory Panel’s recommendations as a starting point for its investigation and brainstorming. In its 2006 report the Advisory Panel recommended the following in regards to the South End:

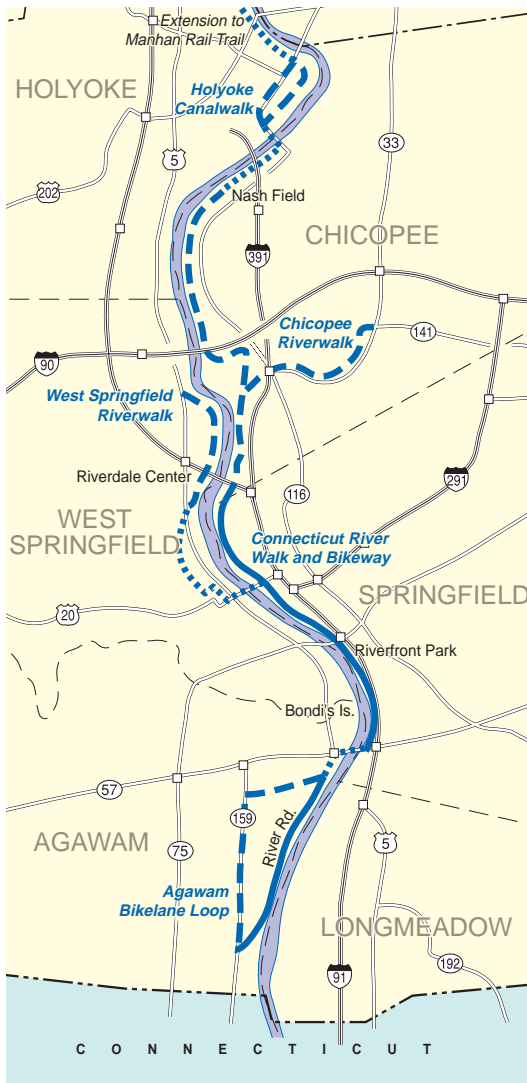
Develop a plan and implementation strategy for the Hollywood-Gemini area in the South End neighborhood. Redevelopment in this area can be a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization. This area can and should become a thriving community with a mix of incomes and housing choices. Steps include:

- Think of the area in its totality, not just as isolated projects;
- Reduce crime;
- Reduce density in the Hollywood project and provide off street parking and play space; and
- Encourage a good mix of neighborhood-oriented retail on Main Street.

Following extensive interviews, site visits, and observations the TAP panel stated: [We] “encountered a neighborhood feeling the weight of declining hope, weakened quality housing stock, with passionate but challenged community leadership of too few in

number carrying too much of the load, and with planning challenges and opportunities that were many and difficult to prioritize and act on” (Hollywood/Gemini Sites, p.3). Though its initial assessment was bleak, the panel’s recommendations built on the idea that the ULI National Advisory Services Panel had created momentum that could be channeled by community groups throughout the city by pursuing the following steps:

**Connecticut River Walk and Bikeway Map**



1. Create a more inclusive community development coalition of stakeholders dedicated to establishing economic development, planning, and funding priorities for the Hollywood-Gemini Area. They must come together and be the change agents for the community.
2. Embark on a Community Master Planning effort to assess the physical environment and recommend changes that will promote safety, connectivity, business and residential diversity that is well founded, patient, and sustainable in the long run.
3. Leverage a wide range of funding alternatives that will support the agreed upon priorities for mixed use development, housing stock diversity, and business/retail development in the neighborhood.

Faced with such an array of challenges, the Hollywood-Gemini TAP panel did not focus on possibilities for strengthened connections to the Connecticut River thereby paving the way for the Riverfront TAP panel to consider strengthened connections between the South End and the Riverfront and also look at dynamic programming in a reconfigured park that could provide opportunities for all members of Springfield’s diverse citizenry to take advantage of the resource.

\* This map prepared by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission with assistance of the Federal Highway Administration, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, and the Massachusetts Highway Department.

The River Runs Through It:  
Lessons Learned from Riverfront Cities

In preparation for the Riverfront TAP, the Urban Land Institute, with support from the University of Massachusetts, brought together key representatives from New England cities whose recent waterfront redevelopment has resulted in significant enhancement of the public realm and has positively contributed to broader economic development within the cities. The panel discussed the dynamics of riverfront revitalization.

Held at the Basketball Hall of Fame on March 4, 2010, the panel included:

- Adam Baacke, AICP, Assistant City Manager and Director of the Division of Planning and Development, City of Lowell, MA
- Thomas Deller, Director, Department of Planning and Development, City of Providence, RI
- Richard Henderson, Executive Vice President of Real Estate, MassDevelopment
- Jay Minkarah, Economic Development Director, City of Manchester, NH
- John Judge, Chief Development Officer, City of Springfield, Moderator

#### d. Other Relevant Planning Efforts

In 1995 the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission released *Connecticut River 2020 Strategy: Action Strategy for Riverfront Revitalization*, a report which presents an ambitious vision for the river's future. The Connecticut RiverWalk and Bikeway, which passes through Springfield's Riverfront Park, is the most visible of a series of res-

toration efforts designed to allow residents and visitors to take advantage of the Pioneer Valley's "premier natural asset." The plan inventories assets and provides detailed plans for each of the valley's six municipalities: Agawam, Chicopee, Holyoke, South Hadley, Springfield, and West Springfield.

Fifteen years after completing the Action Strategy for River Revitalization, Chris Curtis of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission reports that \$400 million dollars has been spent on clean up, which is approximately 50 percent finished and will take at least another 15 to 20 years to complete. Until several years ago, the Commission received nearly \$15 million per year to allocate toward river revitalization, including addressing combined sewer overflow (CSO) issues. Funds have become far more limited now, so the Commission's progress has slowed.

The plan's other key elements include:

- Restoration of fishable and swimmable water quality in the river, by cleaning up combined sewer overflow problems;
- Bring people back to the river through promotion of riverfront attractions;
- Restoration of fish and wildlife habitat areas;
- Promotion of appropriate riverfront economic development in older urbanized areas, by attracting tourism, adaptively reusing historic buildings, and encouraging river-oriented businesses and housing;
- Plan for attractive, well-designed riverfront land uses by adopting riverfront zoning and design regulations;
- Education about the river's natural and cultural history; and
- Promotion of cooperative action on river revitalization.



## e. Panelists and TAP Process

### Panel Members

ULI Boston convened a panel of volunteers whose members represent a range of disciplines associated with land use and development, required to assess and understand the physical and programming challenges that have prevented Riverfront Park and the broader riverfront area from becoming an integral and well used asset for the city. Disciplines represented included planning and urban design, development, architecture and landscape architecture, transportation planning, civil and environmental engineering, and finance and marketing. Members were selected with the intent of convening a robust array of professional expertise relevant to the City's objectives for the study. The following is the list of panelists:

- Steven Heikin, Architect and Planner, ICON architecture, inc. (Co-Chair)
- Lynn Carlton, Planner, Sasaki Associates (Co-Chair)
- Jason Barosso, Civil/Environmental Engineer, Tighe and Bond, Inc.
- Joel Breur, Real Estate, Breuer Property Group
- Nancy Denig, Landscape Architect, Denig Design Associates
- Arthur Jemison, Economic Development/Market Analysis, GLC Development
- Doug Landry, Civil/Transportation Planner, VHB
- John Rufo, Architect, Arrowstreet



The panelists toured the Riverfront area.

Caitlin Bowler of ICON architecture, inc. served as a consulting technical writer. Michelle Landers of ULI Boston provided organizational and technical support in preparation for and during the TAP event.

Officials of the City of Springfield who served as primary contacts for ULI Boston included the following:

- James Judge, Chief Development Officer, Office of Planning & Economic Development
- Brian M. Connors, Deputy Director of Economic Development, Office of Planning & Economic Development
- Phillip Dromey, Deputy Director of Planning

## Stakeholders

The success of this TAP would not have been possible without the cooperation of a diverse group of stakeholders who met with the panel and shared ideas, assessments and opinions on a range of issues. Stakeholder contributors to the Springfield Riverfront TAP included:

- Tim Brennan, Executive Director, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- Jim Buker, Independent Sport and Activity Organizer
- Jaun Campbell, Board President, Springfield Chamber of Commerce
- Don Courtemanche, Executive Director, Springfield BID
- Chris Curtis, Deputy Director, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- John Doleva, President/CEO, Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame
- Melvin Edwards, City Councilor
- Bob McCarroll, Commissioner, Springfield Historic Commission
- Peter Pappas, Developer/Owner, Rivers Landing
- Paul Picknelly, Owner, Downtown Sheraton Hotel, Hilton Garden Inn
- Steve Roberts, President of F.L. Roberts
- Patrick Sullivan, Commissioner, City of Springfield Parks Department

The Panel was kicked off with a greeting from Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno.

## TAP Process

For the Springfield Riverfront sites, the TAP was held on May 4th, 2010 and lasted one full day. In the morning, Springfield's Chief Development Officer, James Judge, and Deputy Director of Economic Development, Brian Connors, met the panelists at the former Visitor Information Center and gave an overview of the Riverfront area, its strengths and weaknesses, major concerns, nearby stakeholders' interests and plans, and the city's general aspirations for it. This introductory meeting was followed by a van tour of the surrounding area and a walking tour of Riverfront Park.

After the van tour the panel interviewed a diverse series of stakeholders (identified above) who included riverfront property owners, commercial abutters, city officials, city staff, city residents, park users, and representatives from other interested organizations. The panelists then engaged in an intensive "charrette," to develop a series of recommendations that were later shared with the community at a public presentation that evening.

The panel delivered its presentation to an audience of approximately 40 people, consisting of business owners, city officials and employees, community residents, public officials, and members of the media. The presentation is available electronically by request from the Office of Planning and Economic Development.

## 2 | Springfield's Riverfront

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### a. City of Springfield's Objectives

As the largest city on the Connecticut River and also one of the oldest, the City of Springfield recognizes that its riverfront and formally developed park is a severely underutilized natural asset and is actively interested in attracting more people to a reinvigorated, reprogrammed and more developed riverfront.

In preparation for the TAP, the City articulated its objectives:

- Explore ideas for future development of riverfront parcels, with consideration of market drivers, best uses, and scale and design;
- Strengthen connections from downtown to Riverfront Park through public space; and
- Create viable connections to Riverfront Park from the South End and other nearby neighborhoods.

A view of Springfield's historic Memorial Bridge from the promenade at the north end of Riverfront Park.

## Study Area and Key Sites



## b. Study Area Boundary

Springfield boasts extensive frontage along the Connecticut River, running some 4.5 miles from north to south of the city. The Riverfront TAP study area, focused on the central portion of this frontage, which stretches 1.5 miles from Memorial Bridge in the northwest to the South End Bridge in the southeast. The width of that slice stretches from the river's edge, across the railroad tracks and I-91, to the north/east side of East Columbus Avenue—a width that varies over the length of the study area, from 500+ to 1,000 feet.

Key sites within the Study Area include Riverfront Park, the former Visitor Center, the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, an adjacent fitness and restaurant complex with regional draw, a Hilton Garden Inn, a fuelling station, and the York Street Site.

## c. Overview of the Study Area

Like many industrial cities in the Northeast, Springfield saw barriers built between its downtown and the riverfront from the late 19th through the middle of the 20th century that still remain. Rail lines still in use by AMTRAK sit closest to the river, running parallel to I-91. The construction of I-91 carved a path through the city's South End neighborhood, effectively cutting off the downtown and South End from the Connecticut River. Today these neighborhoods feel miles apart from river access, though in reality they are just a few blocks away.

Other design features, including limited access points and overgrown vegetation, contribute to the park's feeling of seclusion from the comparatively busy Hall of Fame,



whose rear facade is just 185 feet from the river's edge. The Riverwalk Bikeway terminates in a dead end, which discourages bikers from utilizing the path. The river itself offers challenges for some recreational uses (specifically motor boating), as depths are often too shallow for most uses through the year. However, the river's width, calm surface, and relatively slow flow make it an exceptional river for rowing, second only in Massachusetts to Greater Boston's Charles River.

The Hall of Fame area remains a key draw to the riverfront and to the City, despite visitorship rates lower than originally anticipated. It anchors an entertainment area—referred to alternately as an oasis and island—generally accessed by car that includes an L.A. Fitness club and several successful restaurants—Max's Tavern, Pazzo's Restaurant, Sam's Tavern, Pizzeria Uno, Onyx Restaurant, Subway, and Coldstone Creamery. A Hilton Garden Inn has performed very well since opening opposite the Hall of Fame's southeast parking lot, and

A view of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame looking north from West Columbus Avenue. The privately run facility attracts 250,000 visitors a year.



The York Street Jail Site (left), before demolition of the jail itself. To the right, a view of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame area, looking west toward the Connecticut River.

visitors to both these facilities are served by F.L. Roberts gas station and truck stop, as are the tens of thousands of commuters driving south on I-91 each day.

All of this positive activity is located on an island created by I-91 and the rail lines, which are buffered by fencing and heavy brush. Although at the closest point visitors to any of these facilities are not more than 150 feet from the river, many are unaware that the river is even there.

The Springfield Redevelopment Authority controls two parcels available for development along the Riverfront—the York Street Site and the former Visitor Information Center.

Cleared by demolition of the York Street Jail two years ago, this four acre site is just a block away from the Hall of Fame complex and has excellent visibility and access to I-91. Multi-story development could take advantage of river views.

Since relocation of its operations to the Basketball Hall of Fame, the Visitors Information Center on West Columbus Drive, adjacent to L.A. Fitness, is a vacant 4,100 square feet signature building available for repurposing.

Other parcels available for redevelopment include a publicly-owned parcel adjacent to the city park and a privately owned parking lot adjacent to the base of the scenic Memorial Bridge.

#### d. Market / Economic Analysis

Across I-91 and parallel to the Springfield Riverfront, two neighborhoods—Downtown and the South End—provide the market context in which any residential development along the Riverfront must be considered. In conjunction with recent residential development experience in Hartford, Connecticut—a comparable city—the market rates for residential product in these neighborhoods provides some guidance as to how the market might respond to similar new development along the riverfront.

The Downtown and South End neighborhoods are bounded as follows: on the north by Boland Way, to the south by Mill Street, to the west by East Columbus, and to the east by Maple Street. The set of general residential market findings is based on a recent study of this area. These findings set the market context for the plan.

##### Residential - Rental

- Market rents in buildings in both downtown and the South End profiled in the study before the downturn range from \$.80 to \$1.40 per square foot per month. They are clustered around \$1.00 – \$1.10 per square foot or \$800-\$900 per month for a typical two-bedroom unit. At these rates, standard market rents do not support development of new market rental housing.
- Redevelopment of existing rental buildings shows some promise, given the low price of existing rental housing stock, rents being achieved, and the high occupancy rates of downtown rental buildings.
- Even in some of the healthy, market-oriented developments profiled, the lower

rents in market rental buildings overlap with Fair Market Rents for Section 8 vouchers and eligible rents for Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) which allow up to 60% of area median income. Because of the equity available to developers from the LIHTC program among others, under some conditions, this overlap may create a disincentive for market rental development.

- While these facts may be discouraging, cities like Hartford, with its downtown high rise residence—the Bushnell Tower, have had success in attracting resident’s downtown, so development on a site with direct Connecticut River access could meet the requirement for a “special” site that could achieve special results.

##### Residential – For-Sale

- In Springfield today, the sales price of existing single family housing and the direct hard cost to construct new housing are nearly the same, at approximately \$155,000 per unit. While the premium sales price possible for new construction may help the balance somewhat, this still limits the opportunity to use new housing as a market tool to revitalize the area near the Riverfront.
- However, within the downtown there are several pocket neighborhoods where higher sales prices do exist. An example is the historic houses near the Quadrangle along the streets off Chestnut Street, including Mattoon; and the condominiums at the former Classical High School, the Classical Condominiums along State Street. Depending on the market, since the 1990’s these special properties have been trading in the \$300+ psf range and

provide a sense of the health of the overall market that could exist for new construction on a special site within the City. At these rates and above, new market for sale units could be developed even in a steel construction approach, depending on land costs.

- Also, the economics of developing new single family townhouses or detached housing through modular or stick-built construction may make new construction feasible in some locations. There would certainly be a premium to be had for development of new well planned market housing on the waterfront.
- Absorption will also be an issue. For example, on average between 2005 and 2007, an average of 39 MLS listed single family homes were sold—citywide—in the same year they were built. MLS data represent about 75% of the new for sale property, so it is estimated that the market absorbs approximately 50 new units per year. This suggests that smaller phases of new for-sale residential units will be required for any new project.

#### e. Public Access

Public access is a critical issue for the continued revitalization of the riverfront. As noted in the previous section, in discussions, stakeholders describe this portion of the riverfront as an “interstate-front” rather than a “riverfront area,” which contributes somewhat to its other perception as an island that attracts car driving suburbanites rather than city-dwellers. While these perceptions are not ideal, they are but one part of the area’s ongoing evolution, an evolution that has benefited from significant public actions over the past several decades.

Much of this riverfront area comprises the City of Springfield’s West Columbus Avenue Urban Renewal Area, and as such, there have been deliberate, incremental, and methodical actions taken over the last 20 to 30 years to advance the economic development goals of the community at all levels of government. For example, in conjunction with the development of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame complex, interstate ramps on I-91 were “reversed” to direct traffic onto West Columbus Avenue (now known as Hall of Fame Avenue) rather than off of it. The creation of the Hall of Fame itself was a public/private partnership, with its parking garage subsidized by financial assistance from the Commonwealth. Other elements of the Urban Renewal Plan that were funded by public resources included major utility relocations and the pedestrian overpass of the Amtrak line that connects the site with Riverfront Park.

This riverfront area is a long way from reaching its full potential; these past improvements are the building blocks upon which future work will build.



#### f. Issues raised in Tour & Discussions

The morning tour, by van and on foot, highlighted a series of important issues that any plan will have to address. These include the I-91 underpasses, the railroad tracks and grade crossings, the interruption of the bike path, and the proximity and success of Forest Park.

Later, discussions with stakeholders raised the idea that the riverfront's (and the City's) greatest challenge was the public's perception of it as an isolated and dangerous place. Some argued that the Basketball Hall of Fame and adjacent L.A.Fitness complex were not perceived as oases in the City, but rather as "islands" that allowed visitors to enjoy themselves sequestered from the rest of Springfield. Media bias was identified as a possible contributor to the suburb's negative perception of Springfield and, by extension, Riverfront Park. Any plans or development will need to address this issue of negative perception and include programmatic and physical design elements that create a new image and actively dispel the old.

#### Underpasses

The underpasses beneath I-91 at State Street and Union Street are a huge deterrent to attracting pedestrians to the Riverwalk, even during the day time. These dark, intimidating spaces need to be addressed creatively. One alternative is treating them as sites for "way stations" midway between the commercial Main Street and the recreational Riverwalk.



The pedestrian walk through the State Street underpass beneath I-91.

The bikepath running along the tracks, south of the Hall of Fame.



### Rail Road Tracks / Grade Crossings

The at-grade railroad tracks are a significant barrier to the Riverwalk and severely limit opportunities for convenient access points between the Memorial Bridge and the South End Bridge (as well as other stretches of river front). There is one formal at-grade crossing, at State Street, as well as a narrow underpass 300 feet to the north west. An-

other “informal” grade crossing exists just north of the South End Bridge, but it does not lead to any additional formal Riverwalk path and without adequate signage for users and railroad engineers is relatively dangerous.

In January 2010, the U.S. Department of Transportation awarded \$70 million for the final design and construction of the “Knowledge Corridor” as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) High Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail program, which will realign some tracks to link Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton, and Greenfield with New Haven, CT and Burlington, VT through more frequent and faster Amtrak service.

Though not formalized, there is also some discussion of extending commuter rail service from Hartford past Windsor Locks to Springfield; the site could lend itself as a featured station along this line, with obvious marketing and patronage benefits. With a presumption of Union Station as a terminal stop, a Hall of Fame/Riverfront station would be roughly 1.25 miles away, which is a spacing roughly equivalent to station densities along comparable commuter rail lines, such as the Framingham/Worcester line of the MBTA Commuter Rail system in Massachusetts and the Metro-North Railroad Line in Connecticut.

With faster trains passing through these tracks more frequently, developing a viable strategy for getting visitors across the tracks will be critical to the success of any action on the riverfront.

#### **Framingham/Worcester, MBTA Commuter Rail, Massachusetts**

Wellesley Square to Wellesley Hills	1.28 miles
Wellesley Hills to Wellesley Farms	0.82 miles
Auburndale to West Newton	1.02 miles
West Newton to Newtonville	1.33 miles

#### **Metro-North Railroad, Connecticut**

Southport to Green’s Farms	1.7 miles
East Norwalk to South Norwalk	1.1 miles
South Norwalk to Rowayton	1.8 miles
Rowayton to Darien	1.5 miles
Darien to Noroton Heights	1.5 miles
Old Greenwich to Riverside	1.0 miles
Riverside to Cos Cob	0.7 miles
Cos Cob to Greenwich	1.5 miles

### Bike Path

The grade-level railroad crossing allows access to the Springfield segment of the Connecticut Riverwalk and Bikeway at State Street, which extends along the river to the south east for just over a mile, well past the Basketball Hall of Fame, before it terminates in a cul de sac. To cross the South End Bridge to connect to the Agawam segment of the trail, riders must back track, exit the Riverwalk at State Street and continue southeast on the shoulder or sidewalk of West Columbus Avenue, which are both in poor condition. Finding a way to safely and efficiently connect the Bikeway back to West Columbus Avenue and the South End Bridge access ramp will be a key element to any future planning alternatives.



State Street grade crossing

### Forest Park

In addition to creating connections to the South End Bridge and the Agawam segment of the Riverwalk and Bikeway, the lack of connection from the Riverwalk to Forest Park is a significant missed opportunity. At 735 acres the park is the largest city park in New England, and contains a wide range of amenities including a zoo, a hockey and ice skating rink, a baseball grandstand and diamond, a bocce court, basketball courts, tennis courts, and a beach sand volleyball court. There are miles of walking trails, a rose garden, picnic areas, swimming pool, playgrounds and natural ponds and wetlands.



Citi Performing Art Center stages "Free Shakespeare" at Forest Park.

A linkage between the two amenities could create opportunities for shared events and elevate the profile of Riverfront Park and the Riverwalk.

## 3 | Observations and Findings

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After exploring the Riverwalk on foot on a sunny May morning and being shown expansive views of the Connecticut River valley driving west across the South End Bridge, the panel was fully convinced of the river's inherent value, understood its disconnection from the rest of the city and the subsequent underutilization, and had the opportunity to experience the physical challenges that now prevent the City from creating stronger, more functional connections to its riverfront from the downtown and the South End. This tour, led by Brian Connors and Phil Dromey, provided the physical backdrop against which panelists evaluated the conversations that occurred during discussions with a diverse series of stakeholders, who included riverfront property owners, commercial abutters, city officials, city staff, city residents, park users, and representatives from other interested organizations.

Like almost all challenges facing Springfield, revitalization and utilization of the Connecticut River will involve more than just creating connections across I-91 and the railroad tracks, as many of the interviewees pointed out. The section that follows represents the panel's effort to combine the range of strategies discussed—physical, social, organizational, and temporal—into a coherent “Thematic Framework,” which guided the development of the schematic alternatives and their specific elements during the charrette.

### a. Thematic Framework

#### **Perception**

Shaping a positive perception of the Riverfront should be the primary goal of all design, development, and programmatic interventions in the area. Substantive investment and transformation bolstered by a positive, coordinated marketing campaign by the City (the campaign was launched the day of the ULI TAP) will be crucial to regularly attracting new and return visitors and creating a new identity.

#### **Connection**

This segment of riverfront is ideally situated to reap future benefits of strengthened connections to adjacent districts, nearby amenities, and the larger region. Strengthening connections to downtown and the South End via renovated underpasses is a necessary first step. Finding an efficient route to link the Riverwalk and Bikeway to the Agawam segment, from its existing southern terminus, is important to creating real regional connections. Finally, in the longer term, a commuter rail stop with associated mixed-use development would create the opportunity to deliver users from the greater Springfield region.

#### **Attraction**

Building on existing success is a good common sense approach to attracting more people to the riverfront year round. Two existing uses stand out as viable possibilities for developing attraction in the longer

term: The Basketball Hall of Fame and seasonal sculling. The Basketball Hall of Fame is a destination attraction that could have broader, “repeat” appeal if it has the facilities to host weekend and summer tournaments and clinics, potentially in association with a sports medicine academy that brought local, day-to-day students and instructors to the sites. These may each be independent entities that would benefit from a location near the Basketball Hall of Fame, and vice versa. Similarly, rowing in Springfield has a long, if less reported, history on the Connecticut River, having been host to the Harvard-Yale Regatta a handful of times before this annual race was permanently moved to the Thames River in New London in 1878. With its low speed and calm surface, the river is ideal for rowing, and is used by clubs who row out of Longmeadow. A permanent boathouse is a shorter term, relatively low impact attraction that could have a positive visible impact on the riverfront, bringing activity and focus to the river and providing opportunities for youth rowing through organizations such as the YMCA.

### **Animation**

Enlivening the riverfront for its own sake and as part of a larger effort to shift the public’s perception of it is a process with short, medium, and long term components. In the short term, programming festivals, musical events, and even smaller scale, weekly meetings or outings is a step in this process that can be taken with relatively little capital investment. In the medium term, establishing opportunities for dining or outdoor cafe eating would be a more permanent way to build on early successes. A longer term transformative step would be development

of transit-oriented housing with a small mixed-use component or further development with institutional partners, such as a sports academy near the Hall of Fame.

### **Recreation**

Recreation and leisure is a component of nearly all the previously discussed planning themes, but it is important to encourage a balance of seasonal recreational and leisure opportunities as planning progresses.

### **Destination**

Putting these themes together, the Riverfront could become a destination for a wide variety of users, with multiple synergistic activities. While a “Hoop Hub” anchored at the Basketball Hall of Fame would have regional and national draw, the river, animated by activity opportunities and social spaces, would be a constant local draw.

## **b. Long Term Vision**

At 1.5 miles in length, the riverfront that spans from the Memorial Bridge to the South End Bridge is far too long, and the development and infrastructure existing on its northern edge too varied, to think of the area as “one riverfront.” In response to these existing conditions, the panel chose to divide the riverfront area into three general segments: (1) The Downtown Riverfront, which stretches from the Memorial Bridge to the elevated pedestrian bridge crossing at L.A. Fitness; (2) The Hall of Fame, which extends from the elevated pedestrian bridge to the southern edge of the York Street parcel; and (3) the Southern Riverfront, which stretches from the southern edge of the York Street parcel to the South End Bridge.

## Development Concept



## Downtown Riverfront

From a locational standpoint, the existing parking lot at the corner of Boland Way and West Columbus Avenue, adjacent to the eastern entrance to the Memorial Bridge, is the ideal place for a market rate residential tower with public ground floor uses. Rising 18 to 20 stories, a tower—or towers—filled with one- and two-bedroom flats would give residents prime views of the Connecticut River Valley, while ground floor and lower levels could house riverfront dining and other retail uses to activate the street level and provide the public with access across the tracks down to the riverfront. Parking could be accommodated in lower levels, bringing pedestrian activity up to the level of the Memorial Bridge and providing residents views over the railroad Right of Way.

It is important to note that Riverfront Park is not a dedicated open space, but is actually a city-owned property that is zoned for development, making it possible to consider development of this kind. Riverfront Park, now 125± feet from the existing underpass to the elevated pedestrian bridge at L.A.Fitness, would be reconfigured into a narrower linear park to accommodate stacked low-rise residential duplexes facing the river to both the northwest and southeast of a State Street Terminus Park. This smaller, more intimate park at the State Street entry would provide a gathering place and focal point for riverfront residents and visitors from around the city. Existing public access to the Riverwalk and Bikeway would remain, activated by tower residents who would be frequent users of the natural amenity located just beyond their building's lobby.





*Comparison Project:*  
Four story housing fronting onto a bike path

Finally, a new boathouse would be located at the river's edge on axis with the existing underpass, ensuring a daily flow of users from outside the new residential development in the tower and duplexes.



*Comparison Project:*  
Civic plaza surrounded by low-rise housing and retail in Addison Park, Texas



	City of Springfield, Massachusetts
	<b>Riverfront</b>
	DATA SOURCE: Memorial Bridge to Union Street

Map prepared by Office of Planning & Economic Development



## Hall of Fame TOD

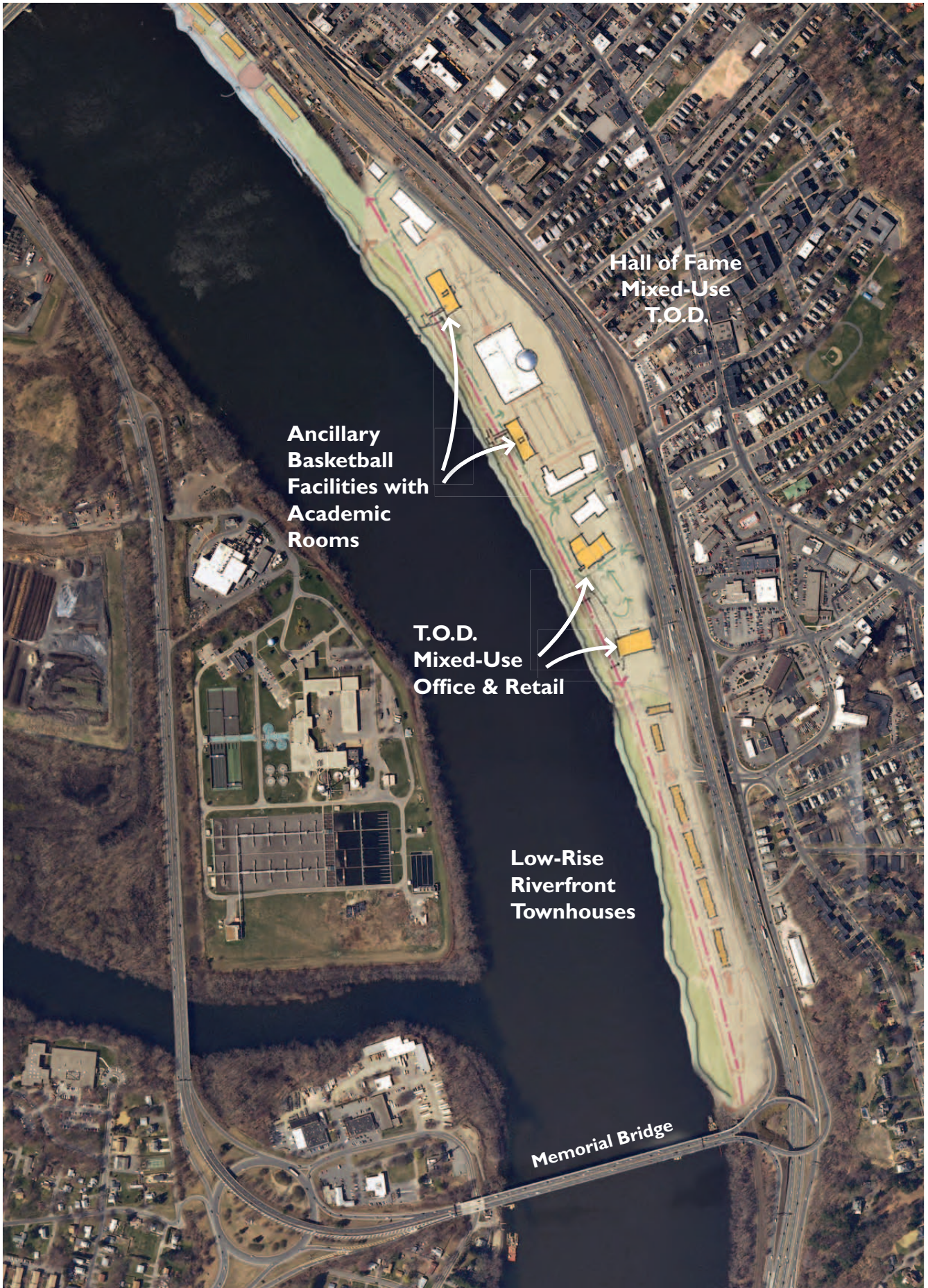
The concept plan for the middle segment of the riverfront builds on the sustained success of the Hall of Fame and the associated restaurant and entertainment uses nearby that have created a steady level of activity in the area. The proposed mixed-use development with basketball tournament facilities would strengthen its appeal and solidify it as a regional destination.

This mixed-use development includes retail and a sports academy, potentially affiliated with Springfield College. The additional retail would be incorporated into the existing Hall of Fame structure on its riverfront side. Two small separate basketball court buildings, one sited to the northwest of the Hall of Fame and one to the southeast, each contain supporting facilities on the ground floor (locker rooms, training rooms, mechanical space, bathrooms, etc), with a court and fan seating above. The elevated courts allow players and spectators views to the river over the rail road tracks. Academic rooms associated with the sports medicine portion of the academy could be located in the ground floor of either of these smaller facilities or in the Hall of Fame itself, drawing a mixture of visitors each day and elevating the profile of the sports medicine academy among the visiting public.



*Comparison Project:* Arborpoint at Woodland Station, located in Newton, MA, was one of the first Transit-Oriented Development in the state.

Transit-oriented, mixed-use office and retail development is the second critical component, clustered around a new commuter rail platform on the York Street Site to be serviced as part of a newly implemented New Haven-Hartford-Springfield “Knowledge Corridor” Commuter Rail Line. The rail would serve both commuters and visitors to the Hall of Fame and the newly renovated Riverfront Park area.



Hall of Fame  
Mixed-Use  
T.O.D.

Ancillary  
Basketball  
Facilities with  
Academic  
Rooms

T.O.D.  
Mixed-Use  
Office & Retail

Low-Rise  
Riverfront  
Townhouses

Memorial Bridge

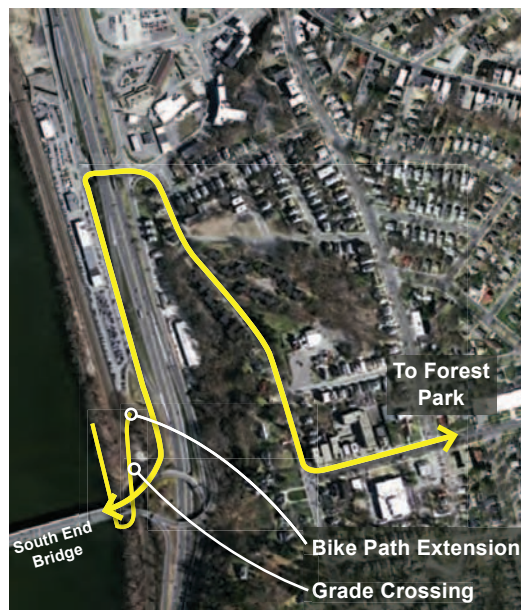
## Southern Riverfront

The southern riverfront site, which is now the site of the Balise Buick GMC car dealership, is the most consistently narrow, measuring just  $145 \pm$  feet from the eastern parcel edge (back of Hall of Fame Avenue sidewalk) to the western edge (railroad easement). The total distance from the eastern parcel edge to the river's edge, which includes the railroad easement and the Riverwalk and Bikeway, is  $250 \pm$  feet.

This plan sites a series of lowrise townhouse buildings along the railroad tracks, with parking on the ground level off an access road along the east side of the larger parcel. Two floors of living space sit above the parking, with views over the tracks toward the river.

The bike path is extended from its current cul-de-sac terminus to a point where it intersects with the current City-controlled public works yard/area at the end of South Street. The bike path then utilizes the existing grade crossing of the Amtrak railroad and follows along "South Street" itself to its intersection with Hall of Fame Avenue. Bicyclists could then choose to continue south and west over the South End Bridge or north along Hall of Fame Avenue. A connection to Forest Park could then be made via the Main Street underpass of I-91 to Longhill Street and then to Sumner Avenue (Route 83).

Issues to be considered for this bike path extension would be the status of formality/informality of the existing railroad grade crossing and the permissibility of bicyclists and pedestrians to use it. The ability for the South End Bridge to accommodate bicyclists should also be explored further.



### c. Short Term Priorities

The redevelopment of Springfield’s riverfront is a decades-long proposition. In the meantime, there are a host of concrete strategies the City can pursue to begin to change perceptions of the riverfront and increase its use.

1. Way Finding / Signage
2. Public Relations Campaign
3. River Vegetation Clearance / Rivers Edge Stabilization
4. Underpass Lighting / Installation / Art
5. Regional Efforts / Knowledge Corridor, Rail

#### 1. Wayfinding Signage

A well conceived and executed plan for wayfinding signage can make a big impact on public awareness of existing attractions and destinations in and around a downtown with a relatively modest investment.

Wayfinding can be useful in many complex environments—inside and out. It is useful in any environment, but would be particularly effective in this area where links between the disparate attractions need to be strengthened.



Comparison Projects:  
Signage in  
Alexandria, Virginia  
and Baton Rouge,  
Louisiana

## 2. Public Relations Campaign

During the TAP interviews, several interviewees articulated their belief that Springfield—and its many assets—suffer from a poor public image that seems to dissuade suburbanites from travelling into the city.

Aware of this issue, the City of Springfield put together a team in September, 2009, composed of City and community leaders and chaired by Barbara Campanella, Vice President of External Relations at Western New England College, to develop a Strategic Marketing Campaign for the City. The team has met 36 times since its inception working on a Brand Development Strategy and are preparing for the campaign's quiet launch during Basketball Enshrinement festivities in August.

The City will lead the campaign with help from a number of partners, including the Springfield Business Improvement District. The major launch will occur in the fall.

## 3. River Vegetation Clearance / Rivers Edge Stabilization



The city's efforts to provide views to the river from the Riverwalk have involved large scale clearing of overgrown vegetation on the river's bank and have been very successful so far.

The Parks Department's efforts on behalf of the city to improve the Riverwalk, both in terms of safety and aesthetics, should be continued along the length of the Riverwalk.

#### 4. Underpass Lighting / Installation / Art

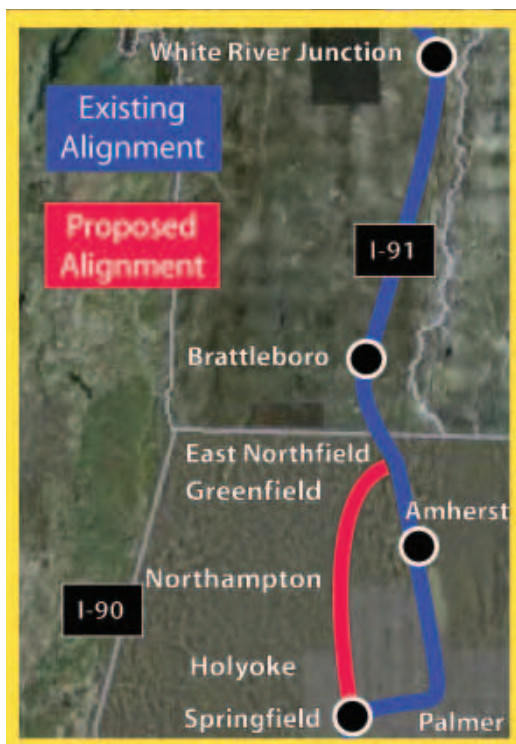


Lights and local art installations can enliven underpasses, which are often cited as barriers and no-go zones because of their unpleasant atmosphere and the real and perceived threats of safety. Other cities have successfully transformed problematic underpasses by commissioning creative lighting, environmental installations and art. Like wayfinding, overpass transformation offers another high impact, low cost opportunity. Coordination with way finding efforts could further maximize this strategy as an opportunity.



## 5. Regional Efforts / Knowledge Corridor, Rail

The possibilities created by dedicated rail funding and planning could have profound effects on Springfield and potentially the development on the Riverfront area. Active tracking of these projects as they move through the various planning stages, to provide advocacy and input on Springfield's behalf—and this area in particular—will be crucial over the next several years.



*Existing alignment for AMTRAK's Vermonter with Proposed alignment for Knowledge Corridor rail*